

What Is A Peer?

People who are your age are called peers, like your classmates or other teammates if you play sports. Often, your experiences can be similar to your peers because you have many things in common. VKAT is a group of peers who share the common goals of learning to be strong and make healthy choices and to help others to do the same. VKAT peers create interesting ways to model healthy behavior in their schools and community such as putting on plays, making posters or holding rallies.

What Is Peer Pressure?

Your peers can have a large impact on your life. They can influence you in both positive and negative ways. Even adults are not free from the influences of their peers. Think about how much time you spend with your friends or classmates, and it's easy to understand why you would pick up certain lessons or behaviors from your peers. Peer pressure takes place when people your age try to influence you or get you to act or do something you may not normally consider. A couple of examples of positive peer pressure might be when a friend tries to persuade you to play a sport, instead of sitting home to watch TV. Or, they convince you to attend the school dance even though you're a little shy.

Negative peer pressure can make it more difficult to make a decision. It will be easier to tackle negative peer pressure if you have some tools ready to practice and you can identify when a peer is trying to get you to act negatively. Negative peer pressure is when someone tries to get you to do something that could hurt you like drink, smoke, shoplift, lie or skip school. Some people give in to peers pressure because they want to fit in or be liked or they are curious and may not have all the facts about something. At times it may appear that "everyone" is doing something like drinking or smoking, but this view is usually false. Here's the reality of what 8-12 graders in Vermont think about a few things.

1. **72% believe that it is wrong to use cigarettes.**
2. **50% believe it's wrong to use alcohol**
3. **62% believe it is wrong to use marijuana**
4. **84% believe it's wrong to use other drugs like cocaine, heroin and LSD**

How to Resist Negative Peer Pressure

Find an ally

Do you have a friend that shares the same values as you and is willing to also say no to negative peer pressure? When you stand up for what you believe, you set an example for others to do the same. You might be surprised to find yourself surrounded by a group of new friends.

Try a new avenue

Another way to stay away from peers who are a negative influence is to find like-minded peers in activities that you find interesting. Join a club, sport or organization or start your own group. It is easier to resist negative peer pressure when you surround yourself with positive influences instead.

Be firm and use eye contact

Use a serious tone and make a statement about why you won't do something. People use pressure when they know someone is in a weak or vulnerable position. You may feel alone and scared but try to be clear in your intent to not back down on your position, keeping eye contact as you do this.

Walk away

Say “no” and walk away

Talk to someone you trust

It’s ok to tell a parent, teacher, counselor or someone else you trust when you are finding it difficult to handle peer pressure. They may be able to offer suggestions and support to help prepare you for the next time you are in a similar situation.

Make an alternative Suggestion

Most of the time peers try to pressure others because they are afraid and don’t want to do something alone. Instead, try to persuade them to see a movie, go to the mall or some other activity.

What is Prevention?

When you stop something from happening before it starts is the best description for prevention. You can set up positive and influential obstacles to stop something. To prevent exposure to second hand smoke restaurants and businesses ban smoking cigarettes indoors. This promotes a healthier atmosphere for everyone. Can you think of examples of prevention from your life?

Get the facts

When you don’t understand something it is difficult to make responsible and informed decisions without all the correct information. How will you know what or how to prevent something without all the facts? Getting information about an issue is done through communication. You can talk to someone, ask experts, read a book, research credible web sites or use the many resources at your school or local library.

What are we preventing?

You may not be able to stop alcohol, drugs and tobacco from being in society but you can prevent their abuse. When someone decides to use drugs or alcohol or tobacco they may not be aware that their choice can have an impact on the rest of their life. Often people abuse these substances because they feel powerless, lonely or they want to escape their feelings. Other reasons could be that they are curious and don’t have all the facts about what they are doing or, they want to be accepted by their peers who are also drinking or smoking. Can you think of other reasons that your peers might abuse drugs or alcohol?

VKAT is about helping ourselves and others make healthy choices through information and education. You can help prevent your peers from making poor choices about alcohol, drugs and tobacco by being strong and taking care of yourself first. When you present yourself as confident, strong and capable you are less susceptible to peer pressure and can be more helpful as a role model for your peers. When you know the truth about something you are more likely to make a more responsible and healthy decision.

Peer Prevention Is...

Helping others and ourselves to make healthy choices through education, action and information.

Did you know?

46% of your male peers and 62% of your female peers would talk to a friend first if they had a problem with tobacco, alcohol or other drugs.